

MODULE A: Genre
Elective 2: Crime Writing
Prue Greene - DEC



Working from the Syllabus

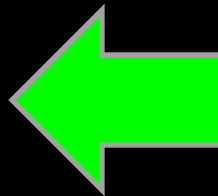
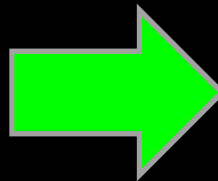
“changing contexts and values have brought about changes in the traditional crime stories and resulted in new conventions, new understandings of what constitutes a crime and who plays the role of detective and even what ‘justice’ means.”

The Story

How it is told

**The effect of context
and values on the
shaping of the story**

**Crime writing
conventions – does it
comply with or
subvert them:
the role of the
detective, the police,
the crime, the clues
and how the crime is
solved**



Directorial choices:

**actors
action
shots
camera angles
editing
script
costume
sound
design of the mise-
en-scene**

The Story

‘changing contexts and values’

Post World War II America



- McCarthyism and the loss of faith in public officials and distrust with the representatives of justice
- General distrust of the person next door who may have communist sympathies or be involved in communist activities. From 1941 -57 it was illegal to be a member of the Communist Party
- Empowerment of ordinary people to take an active role in policing their own worlds - to be vigilant and watchful

‘changing contexts and values’

Post World War II America

“a more personal kind of menace”

“a brave new world in which we are becoming conditioned to suspect our neighbours and expecting the worst”

Alfred Hitchcock

“We’ve become a race of Peeping
Toms”

- Stella

Modern surveillance

The Story

Post World War II America

- Optimism
- Consumerism
- The rise of 'glamour' – Christian Dior's *New Look*
- Changing roles and attitudes of women after war-time employment



Genre in film

Genres are paradoxical

- They repeat generic formulas that 'work' and yet shift and modernise generic conventions.
- Audiences expect familiarity as well as change and innovation.
- Film is rarely generically pure. They **rework, extend** and **transform** the norms that codify them.
- Changes to genre reflect social change and audience expectations

Genre in film

Genre is always *in play* rather than being, simply, re-played

Detective film genre

The detective film genre aims to create curiosity about past story events (e.g. who killed whom), suspense about upcoming events, and surprise with respect to unexpected disclosures about the story.

To promote all three emotional states, the narration must limit the viewer's knowledge.

We learn what the detective learns, when she or he learns it. By restricting the range of knowledge to that possessed by the detective, the narration can present information in a fairly unselfconscious way, we pick up fabula information by following the detective's inquiry.

New /old conventions

- *The Daughter of Time* by Josephine Tey (1951) . A detective investigates a historical crime from his hospital bed
- The private eye outsmarting the police – hardboiled and classic detective stories etc.
- Social class and sophistication – in English crime writing detectives were often from wealthy and educated backgrounds

New /old conventions

Jeff

- not a detective but well educated, sophisticated
- his profession gives him particular skills – he looks and makes meaning and stories with photographs
- placed in an unusual situation which is the opposite of his active and adventurous life and a ‘one-off’ – detecting is not a hobby
- has a friendship with a policeman rather than a professional relationship

The Story

subversions and transformations

- The 'trapped' detective – inactive and powerless
- The woman as agent – acting on his and her own behalf
- The tracking and surveillance of the criminal before the crime, no need for the conventional witness statements to fill the 'back-story'



"It is not a tale of 'who did it' whereby the viewer awaits to see if the detective can solve the crime rather one waits to see if Jeff's hypothesis is true"

subversions and transformations

- The apartment complex becomes the 'closed world' of traditional 'country house' or village detective stories'
- The detective's helper or 'side-kick' is also his girlfriend
- The crime is uncovered by the 'detective' rather than being brought to him to be solved – Jeff discovers and solves the crime



The Story: narrative structure

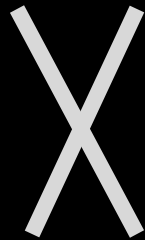
Dual Narratives, dualities and binary oppositions

The Romance

Will Jeff and Lisa
break up?

Man of action
and adventure
becomes
dependent on a
woman

'High
maintenance'
dependent
woman becomes
woman of action
and adventure



The murder mystery

Has Thorwald
killed Mrs
Thorwald?

Can Jeff prove
she was
murdered?

Can Lisa find the
evidence?

The Couples

Thorwald cares
for an invalid
wife

Lisa cares for an
invalid boyfriend

How the story is told

The auteur – Alfred Hitchcock

Although adapted from a novel by Cornell Woolrich, and written by John Michael Hayes, Alfred Hitchcock is considered to be the author (or auteur) because of his composition of the mise-en-scene according to *Auteur Theory* which was first discussed by French film theorists. Francois Truffaut had a major role in valuing Alfred Hitchcock and his films beyond Hollywood.



Truffaut's theory maintains that all good directors (and many bad ones) have such a distinctive style or consistent theme that their influence is unmistakable in the body of their work.

mise-en-scene =
everything that
appears before
the camera

The auteur – Alfred Hitchcock and *Rear Window*



Distinctive style and themes

- the visual – use the visual component of film to create reactions in the viewer e.g. the building of suspense
- scopophilia – the act and love of looking
- voyeurism – looking through windows or at the lives of others
- The master of delay – the audience knows something is going to happen but when?

"Once the screenplay is finished, I'd just as soon not make the film at all...I have a strongly visual mind. I visualize a picture right down to the final cuts."

mise-en-scene = everything that appears before the camera

You must pay attention to everything in the film that has meaning:

- objects – a close reading of the opening scene as a introduction to character
- sound- diegetic and non-diegetic and its role in setting mood
- lighting – how it is used to create suspense and indoor /outdoor experience
- placement of the actors within the scene – vectors created by the shapes
- setting – how is this used to give meaning?

"I make it a rule to exploit elements that are connected with a character or a location; I would feel that I'd been remiss if I hadn't made maximum use of those elements,"

FADE IN:

INT. JEFFERIES' APARTMENT - (DAY) - LONG SHOT

Although we do not see the foreground window frame, we see the whole background of a Greenwich Village street. We can see the rear of a number of assorted houses and small apartment buildings whose fronts face on the next crosstown street, sharply etched by the morning sun. Some are two stories high; others three; some have peaked roofs, others are flat. There is a mixture of brick and wood and wrought iron in the construction. The apartment buildings have fire escapes, the others do not.



The opening sequence: the viewer as detective, reading the clues

- The shot out the window positions the viewer as voyeur and introduces the way which the director wants you to view the film
- Jeff's smashed camera answers the question about how he breaks his leg
- Action images show us the kind of man he is...
- The viewer sees what Jeff sees out the window: a selection of stories that he can switch between
- Shot reverse shot sequences suture the viewer into the experience and induces empathy with characters





Viewing: suturing the viewer into the experience with shot-reverse-shot – a montage to evoke emotions

The subjective view – Jeff's face and what he's looking at











“Tell me everything you saw and what you think it means”

Tools of the trade and the shadow



Suspense through shot-reverse-shot









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PROGRAM

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Features
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Brit Noir: Rainy Sundays, Stormy Mondays
Focus on Austria



Rear Window

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BUY TICKETS

Director Alfred Hitchcock

Year 1954

Country USA

Classification M

Runtime 112 mins

Language English

Screenwriter John Michael Hayes

Producer Alfred Hitchcock

Cinematographer Robert Burks

Editor George Tomasini

Cast James Stewart, Grace Kelly, Raymond Burr

Australian Distributor Universal Pictures International Australasia

Rear Window - a life of its own

Its value beyond a work of Crime Writing

General popularity

Academia – film theorists

Feminist criticism

Spectatorship and the Gaze

Internet resources:

The Geometry of Terror - http://www.ark.fi/ark4_97/hitchcoche1.html

Narration in the Fiction Film – David Bordwell

